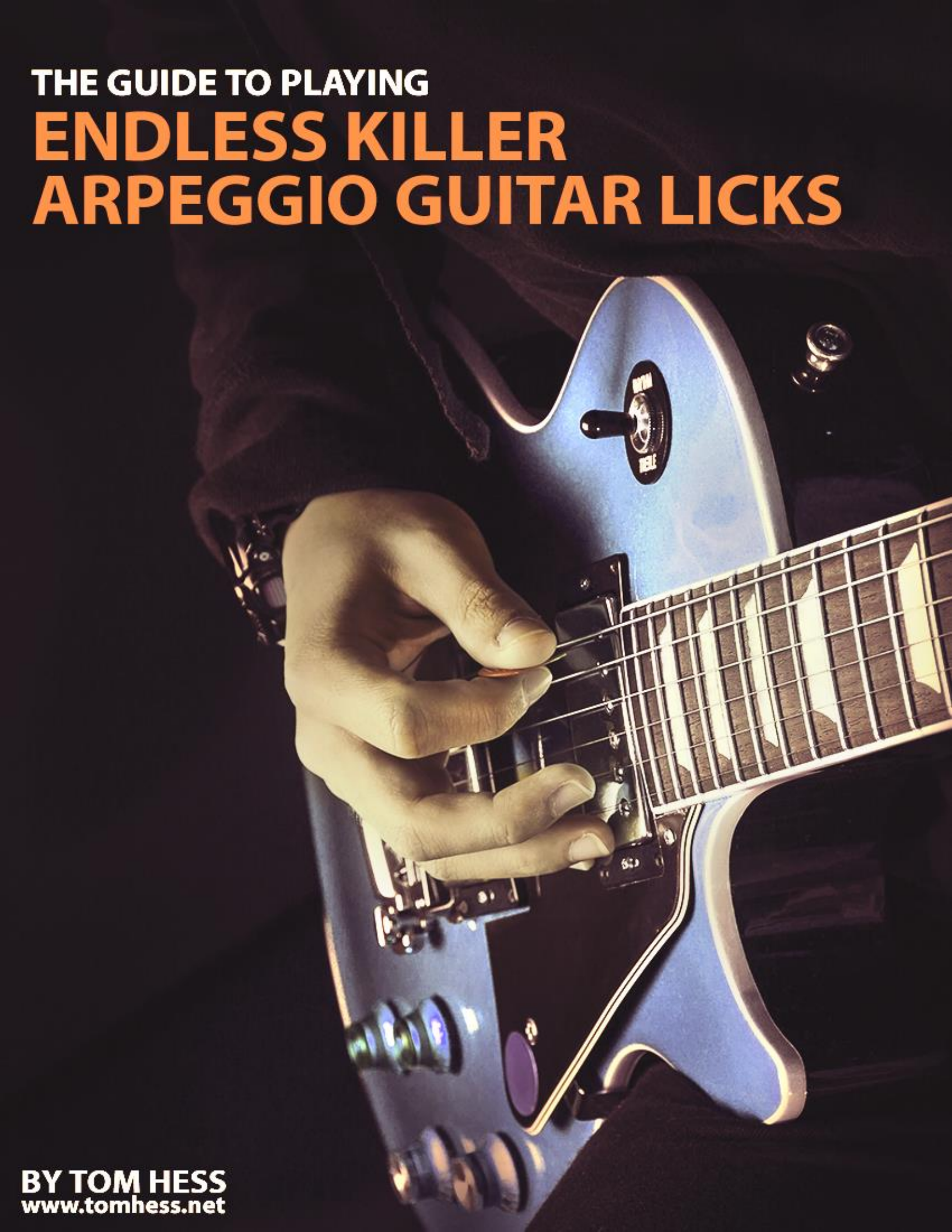
THE GUIDE TO PLAYING

ENDLESS KILLER ARPEGGIO GUITAR LICKS



BY TOM HESS
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The Guide To Playing Endless Killer Arpeggio Guitar Licks

Creating your own killer arpeggio guitar licks is not hard and you can do this with all the arpeggios you *already* know. All it takes is learning to transform any arpeggio into dozens of creative variations. Yes, you read correctly: you can literally find *dozens* of ways to play any arpeggio by using elements of guitar phrasing, music theory, fretboard visualization and general musical creativity. Best of all, most of these variations are very easy to play (and sound awesome!).

In this guide, you will see many examples of playing a basic minor triad arpeggio in very cool and creative ways. Most importantly, you will learn the thought process that went into creating each variation and the reasons why each example sounds cool. These insights that will help you learn to create *your own* killer sweep picking licks anytime you want.

Before you read on, there are 2 important concepts you need to understand to get the most from this guide:

1. The specific *examples* you will see below are NOT important. The biggest value is in the *processes* used to create examples. You can of course practice each example, but do not distract yourself by trying to *master* each arpeggio shown here.

This leads to my next point:

2. To benefit the most from this guide, you must also be focusing on mastering sweep picking on a physical level. This will enable you to learn these sweep picking examples more quickly and easily transform them into your own killer arpeggio licks. To get help with making

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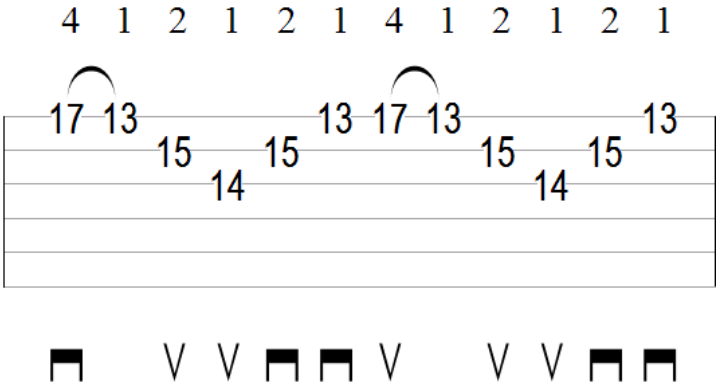
your sweep picking fast and clean, check out:
http://tomhess.net/LearnToSweepPickFastAndClean

The basis for most of the examples below will be this 3 string arpeggio:



Hear It

This is a D minor arpeggio in 2nd inversion. Its notes are D F A (but in this arpeggio, the lowest sounding note is A).

Here are lots of examples of creative ways to play this arpeggio:

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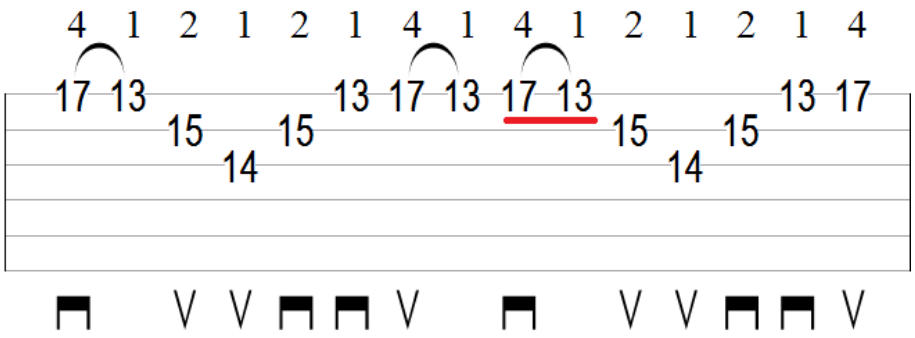
<u>Example 1:</u> This variation is created by repeating the 2 highest notes on the high E string (the pull off from the 17th fret to the 13th fret) underlined in the tab below.



Hear It

What makes this variation cool is the use of the concept I call "contour shift". The first 8 notes of the arpeggio established a specific contour (movement pattern) of the notes, that went as follows:

- The first 4 notes of the arpeggio were played in a descending order.

- The next 3 notes were played ascending.

- The 8th note of the arpeggio (the pull off to the 13th fret on the high E string) began a descending pattern.

The listener's ear now expects this pattern to continue (for the arpeggio to continue to descend).

By breaking this pattern and repeating the 2 highest notes (underlined in red above), you create a contour *shift* - breaking

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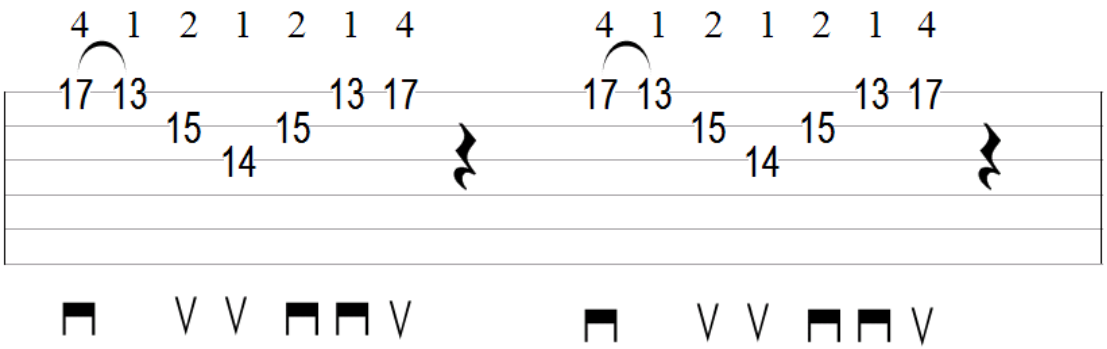
the listener's expectation for the arpeggio to continue to descend. This builds lots of musical tension.

Contour shift is an advanced musical creativity concept that I teach to my online guitar students. It can be applied to any musical element or technique (not only to arpeggios) to make your guitar playing highly creative.

Example 2: This variation uses silence (rests) to create a break in the listener's expectation for the music to continue. By playing a fast burst of notes followed by a brief moment of silence/rest, great musical tension is created. Look at the tab and listen to the audio example below to see/hear this concept.



Hear It

Silence is a simple (and extremely effective) creative tool that will make your listeners pay attention to every note you play.

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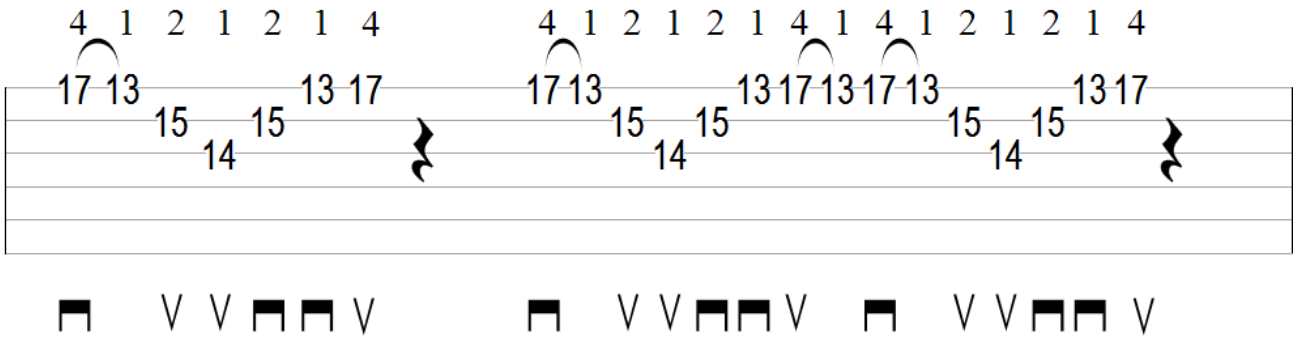
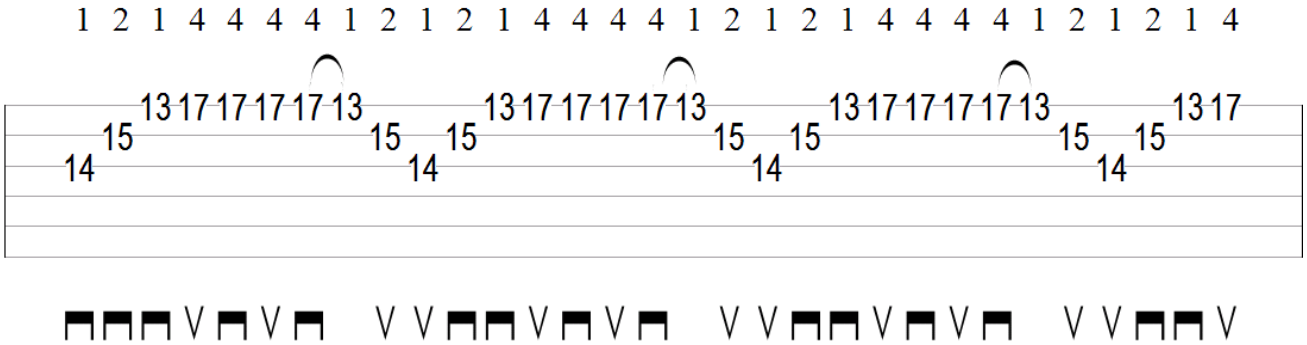
Example 3: This example combines the previous 2 ideas: repeating the 2 highest pitches and unexpected short rests in between fast bursts of notes:



Hear It

Example 4: The example below uses tremolo picking on the highest note of the arpeggio (17th fret of the high E string).



Hear It

Using tremolo on the highest note is particularly effective, since the highest pitch stands out the most to the listener's ear. This variation of the arpeggio sounds VERY intense (and it's not that hard to play).

To create licks like this, you should stop thinking of sweep picking as an *isolated* technique. You need to practice integrating arpeggios with other techniques to turn them from

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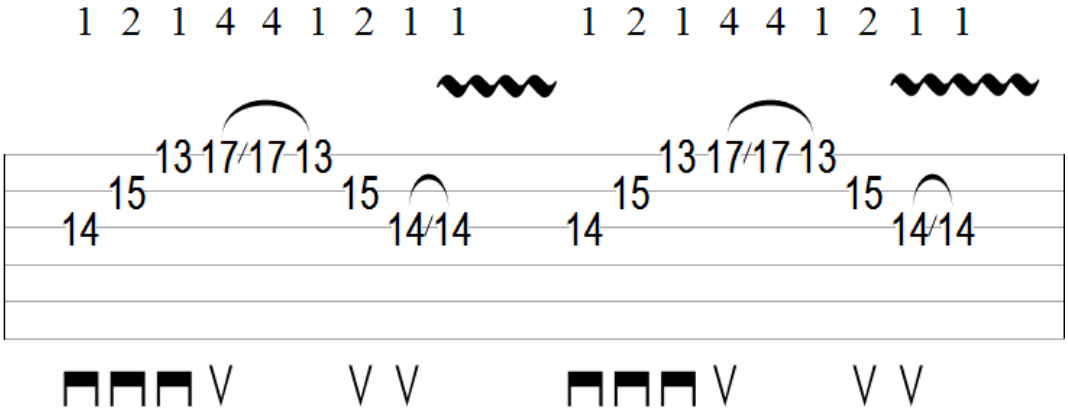
exercises into awesome guitar licks (more examples of this below).

As a side note: you must make the general concept of *integration* a regular part of you practicing (with all techniques and musical skills you are working on). This is one of the things I focus on heavily with my guitar students to help them develop into incredible guitarists very quickly.

Example 5: This variation uses a phrasing ornament (slides) back and forth from the highest and lowest notes of the arpeggio.



Hear It

Important: the slides in the tab above are done "to nowhere". You are NOT sliding to any particular pitch on the fretboard, nor are you adding any notes to the arpeggio. Each slide is simply an ornament of the 17th fret of the high E string and the 14th fret of the G string, respectively. This is why it's not shown in the tab "what note to slide to" - the only important thing is the note you are sliding *from*. Everything else about the arpeggio is exactly the same as the original pattern we started with.

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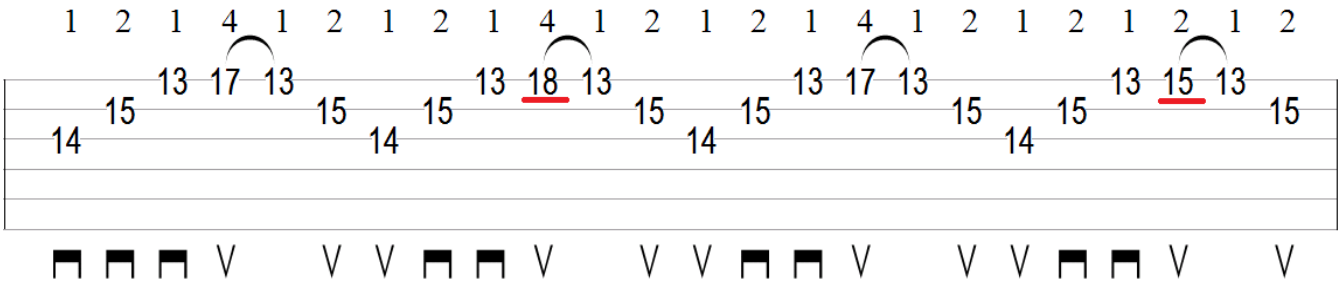
To see a more detailed demonstration of this phrasing concept (applied to playing scales/scale sequences), watch this video.

Example 6: This next variation incorporates other notes of the D minor scale into the arpeggio. See the underlined pitches in the tab below:



Hear It

Adding other notes of the scale into the arpeggio is a great effect, for a few reasons:

1. Alternating between the highest notes in the arpeggio each time it is repeated goes against the listener's expectations to hear the arpeggio continue a certain way. This creates musical tension.

2. When the arpeggio is played fast, the 3 highest notes (frets 17, 18 and 15 of the high E string) outline a short melodic motive. This makes the arpeggio sound less like an exercise and a lot more like a distinct musical phrase that can be used in a solo or song.

To easily integrate this concept (of adding other notes from the scale) into your guitar licks, you must work on your fretboard visualization with scales and arpeggios. When you don't know

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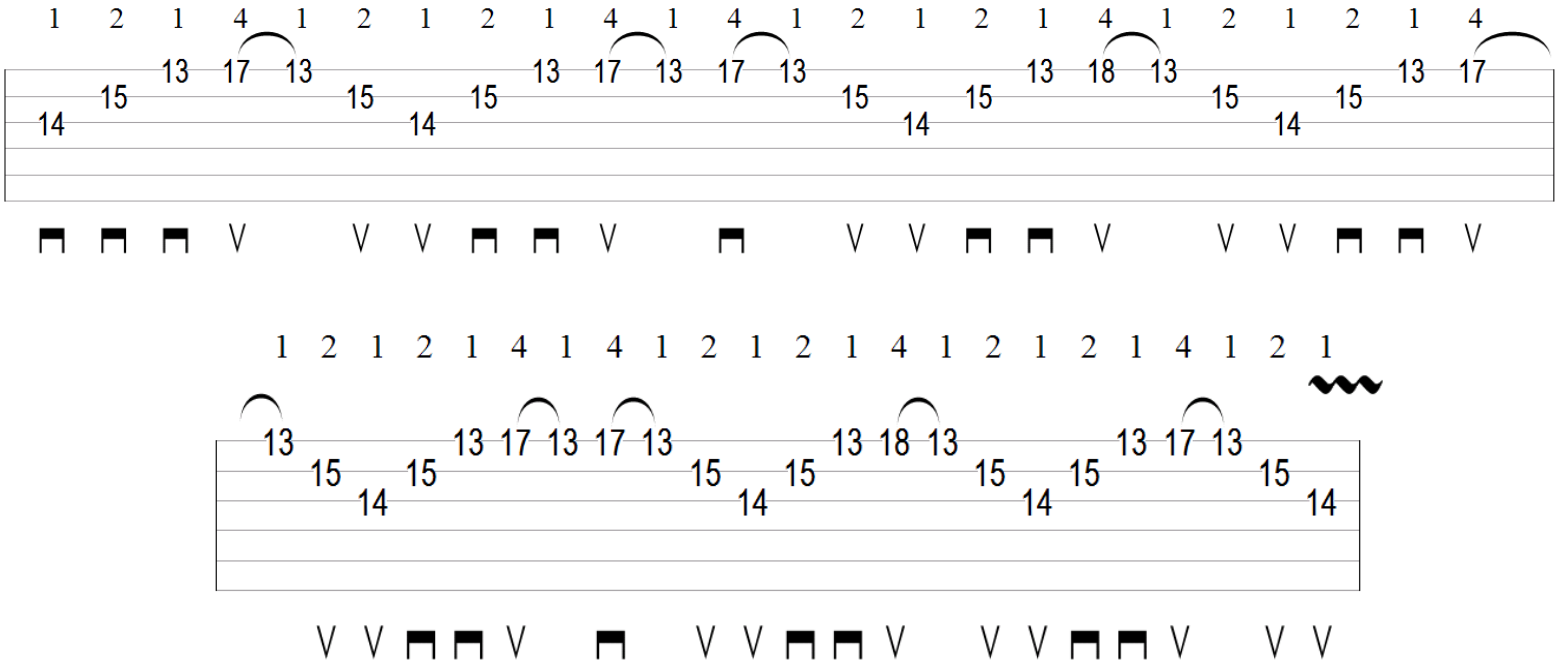
where the notes of the scale are in every area of the guitar neck, your creativity is limited to playing the notes of the original arpeggio. Once you *do* master fretboard visualization fully, it becomes effortless to add other notes to the original arpeggio without relying on trial and error.

<u>Example 7:</u> This variation combines the concepts of contour shift together with adding a new note (from the D minor scale) to the D minor arpeggio. This helps to break up the monotony of repeating the same 3 notes of the arpeggio in the same way every time. Best of all, licks like this are not any harder to play (physically) than the original arpeggio.



Hear It

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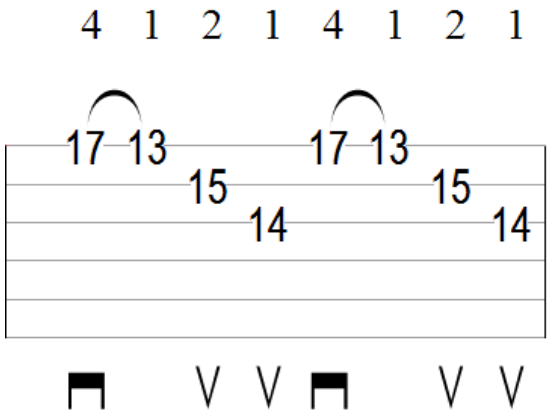
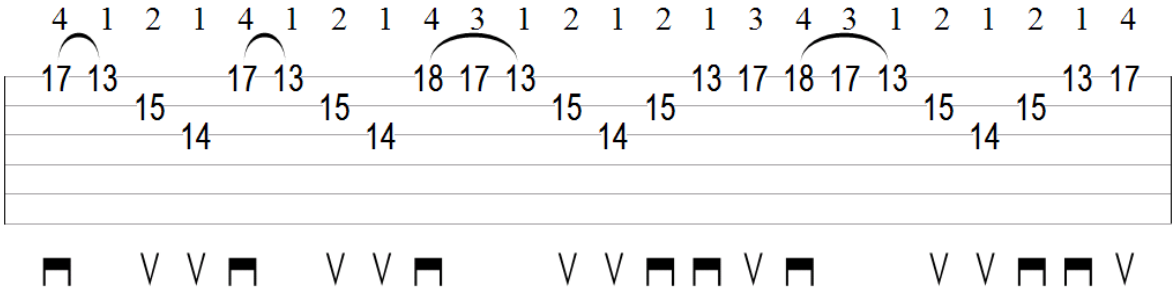
Example 8: This variation only uses the descending part of the arpeggio:



Hear It

Removing the ascending portion of the arpeggio is yet another creative example of *contour shift*. Going against the natural expectation to hear the arpeggio ascend builds musical tension and draws the listener's attention to your guitar playing.

Example 9: This variation begins by only playing the descending part of the arpeggio and then adding other notes of the scale to it to create a cool lick:



Hear It

This lick sounds cool because it contains *multiple* instances of playing against the listener's expectations. The first break in

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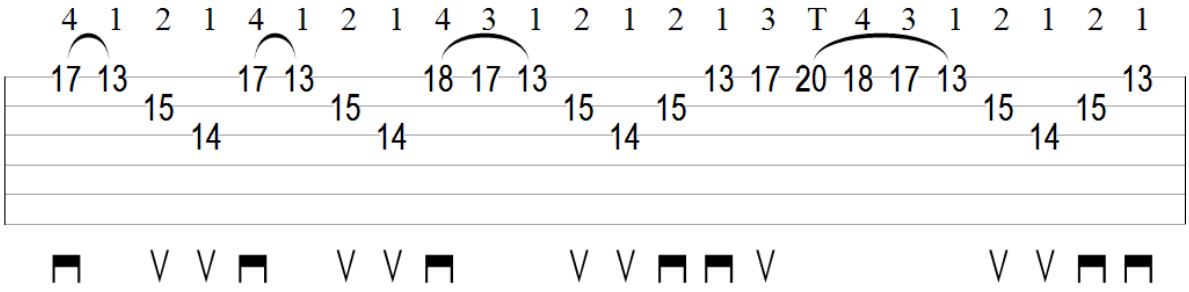
the expectation comes from starting the arpeggio by only playing its descending pattern. The second break comes from adding a note that is not in the original D minor arpeggio (the 18th fret on the high E string). The third break in the pattern comes from suddenly ascending through the arpeggio and playing more notes on the high E string. The 4th break in the listener's expectation comes from double picking the note on the 17th fret to start the lick over.

Of course when the entire lick repeats, you (the listener) start to notice the larger pattern that repeats over and over. That said, by incorporating *several* creative elements into this arpeggio lick, you will be able to play it a lot longer before it becomes boring to listen to.

Example 10: This variation is similar to the previous one, only you are adding 2 new notes that are not in the original arpeggio and you are integrating sweep picking with a bit of 2-hand tapping.



Hear It

As you can see, one of the biggest keys to creating expressive arpeggio guitar licks is to combine sweep picking with *other* techniques, creative concepts and elements of music. To create (and fluently play) licks similar to this example, you must have

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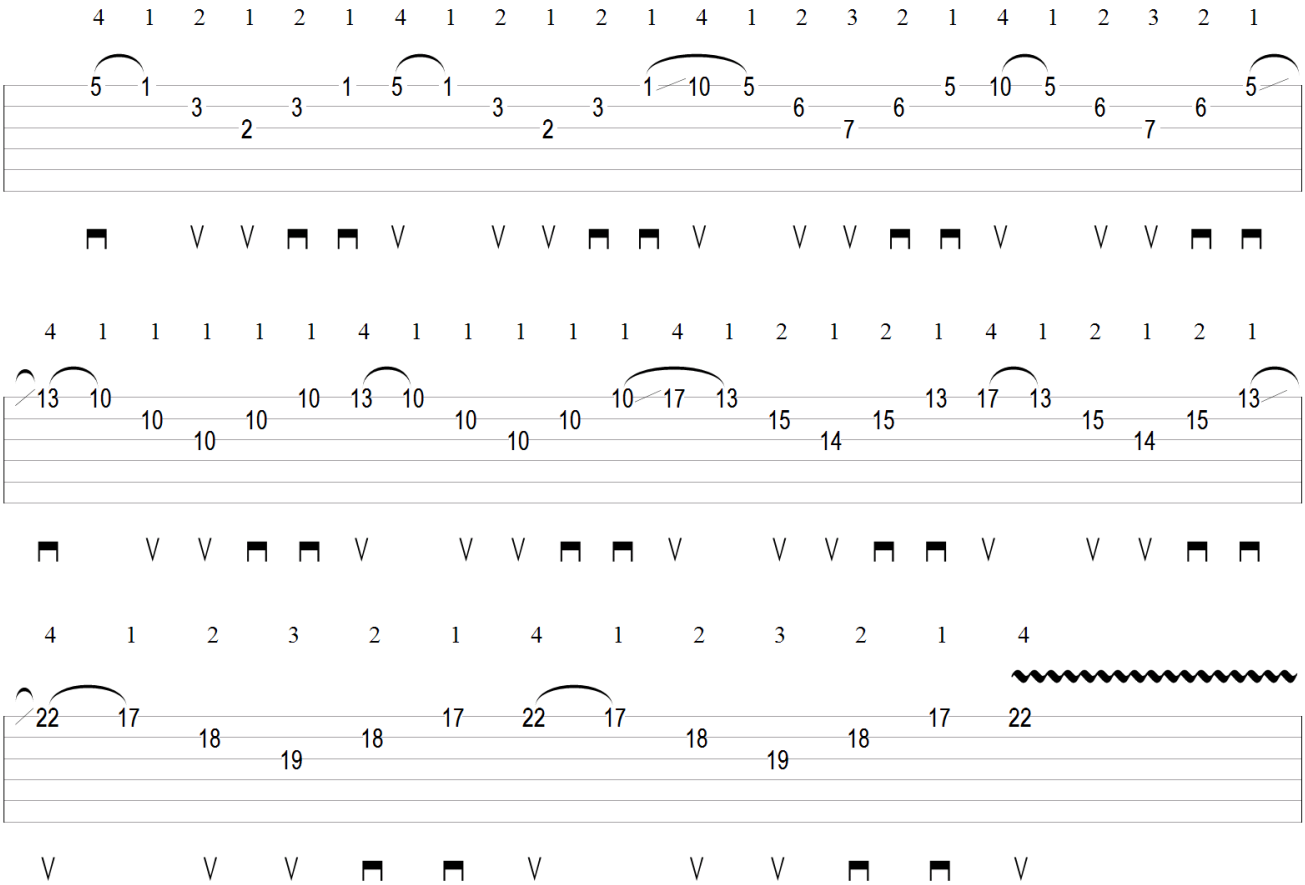
a very high level of fretboard visualization and ability to combine several techniques together when you play guitar.

<u>Example 11:</u> The example below may at first look as if it has nothing to do with the original D minor arpeggio. In reality, this lick IS the same D minor arpeggio, only played in several arpeggio shapes spanning the entire fretboard.



[Hear It]

The first half of the 1st measure (that starts on the 5th fret of the high E string) is the D minor arpeggio in 2nd inversion (one octave lower than the arpeggio we started from). The second

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half of the measure (that starts on the 10th fret of the high E string) is the root position of the D minor arpeggio).

The first half of the 2nd measure (that starts on the 13th fret of the high E string) is the 1st inversion of the D minor arpeggio. The second half of the measure (that starts on the 17th fret of the high E string) is the 2nd inversion of the D minor arpeggio. This is the shape that we have based all variations on so far.

The 3rd measure of this variation (that starts on the 22nd fret of the high E string) is a root position D minor arpeggio.

Listen closely to the audio recording of this example and you will hear that the same 3 notes are simply being repeated from one arpeggio shape to the next.

Creating this arpeggio lick relies on a fluent understanding of how triads (and their inversions) are built in music theory and how they are laid out on the fretboard.

If you struggle to understand these concepts and use them in your music, work with a guitar teacher who will show you how to master and apply this knowledge to your playing.

Example 12: This variation uses the same notes as the original D minor 2nd inversion arpeggio, but the notes are played in different order. Each note is played in alternation with the highest pitch of the arpeggio (the 17th fret of the high E string).

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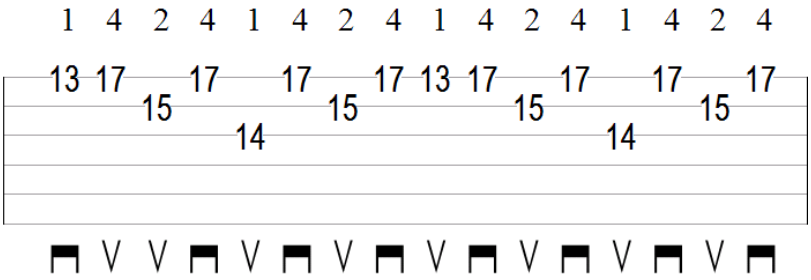
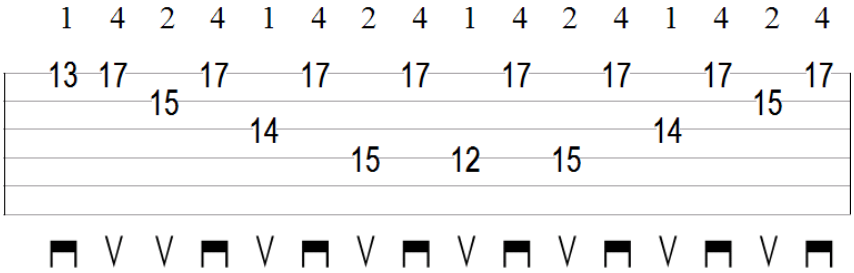


Hear It

To play this lick cleanly and fast, you need to use accurate string skipping motions with the pick. Be careful not to hit the strings that your pick is supposed to skip by moving the pick in a small arc from one note to the next.

Note that even though you are not using sweep picking in this example, you are still playing an *arpeggio* (the notes of a D minor chord played one at a time).

Example 13: This variation is very similar to the previous one, only the arpeggio is extended further (onto the 4th string).



Hear It

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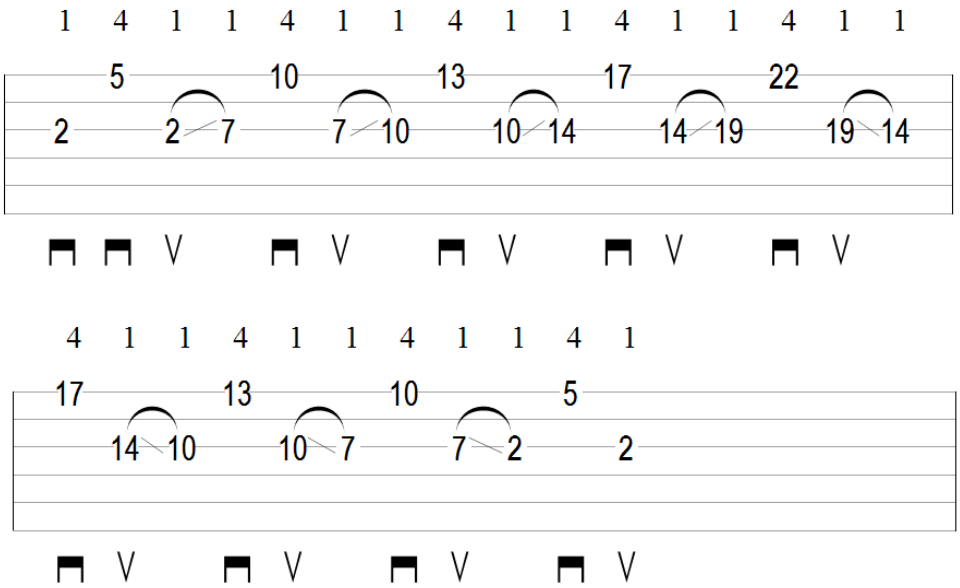
<u>Example 14:</u> This variation uses string skipping in combination with slides to play the arpeggio in a very smooth way. Each pair of notes on the G and high E strings are octaves apart (they are the same note). The notes of the D minor arpeggio are outlined horizontally (by sliding up and down on the G string)



[Hear It]

Mastery of fretboard visualization is essential for creating a lick like this, in order to know:

1. Where the notes of the D minor arpeggio are on the G string (and every other string).
2. How to play an octave of every note on the G string to create a cool doubling effect during the arpeggio.

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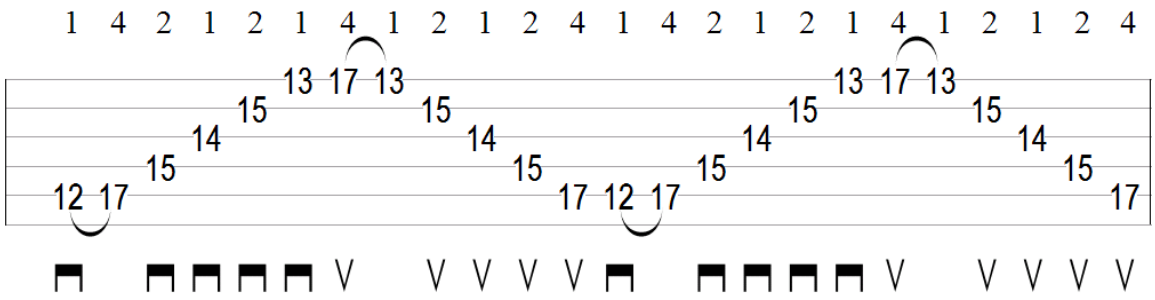
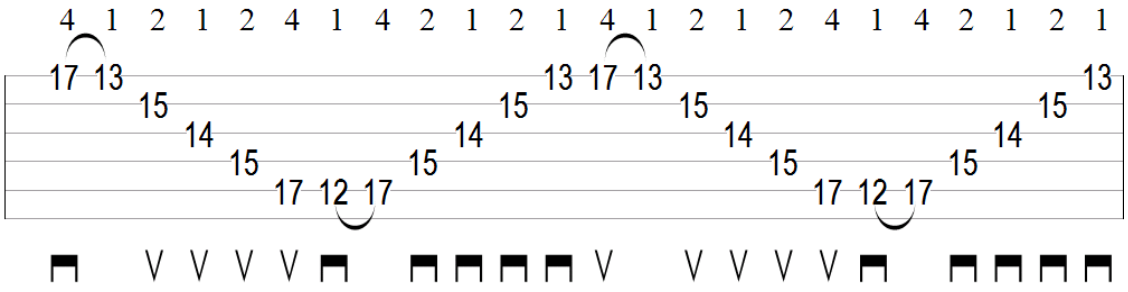
Example 15: This variation is a simple extension of the original 3 string D minor arpeggio we started from. The notes are exactly the same (D F A), but the arpeggio is now played on 5 strings, instead of 3.



Hear It

The key here is to realize that when you learn any arpeggio, you can either extend it to more strings, or play it on fewer strings. As long as you are playing the 3 notes of the original arpeggio, the possibilities for *how* to play them are virtually limitless.

Example 16: This example is identical to the previous one, only we start the arpeggio from the highest note (on the high E string) instead of the lowest note (on the A string).



Hear It

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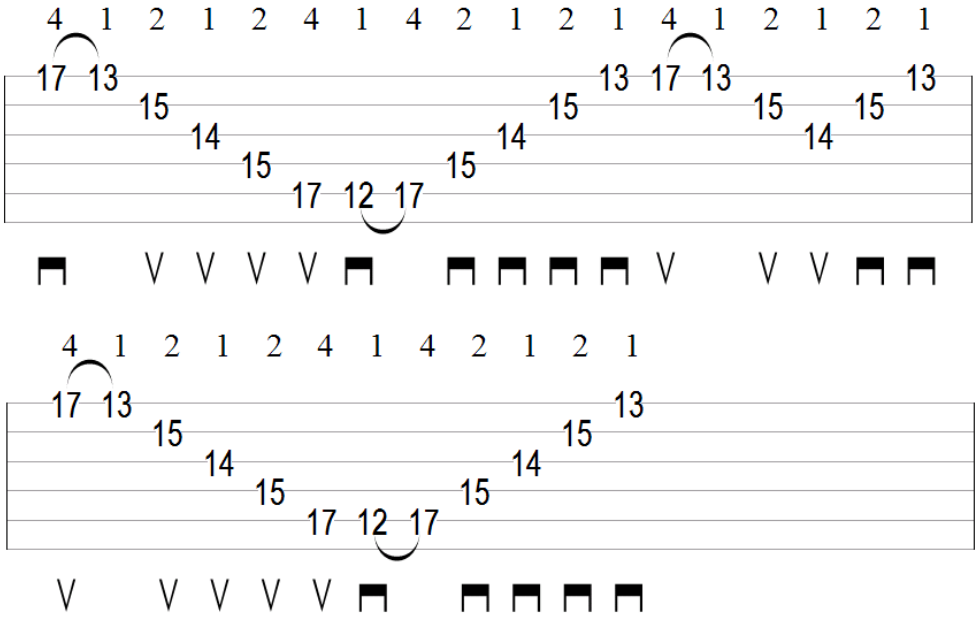
<u>Example 17:</u> This variation combines a 5-string arpeggio with its 3-string version.



[Hear It]

Contour shift is yet again used here to make this arpeggio variation sound cool. After descending and ascending the 5-string arpeggio, your ear naturally expects the arpeggio to descend again on 5 strings. By playing against that expectation and inserting a 3-string arpeggio, cool musical tension is created.

<u>Example 18:</u> This variation combines a 5-string arpeggio with a 3-string D minor arpeggio, together with repeating the two highest notes on the high E string. This creates a contour shift on 2 different levels: 1. By combining the 5-string and 3-string arpeggios and 2. Through the unexpected repetition of the 2 highest notes of the arpeggio.

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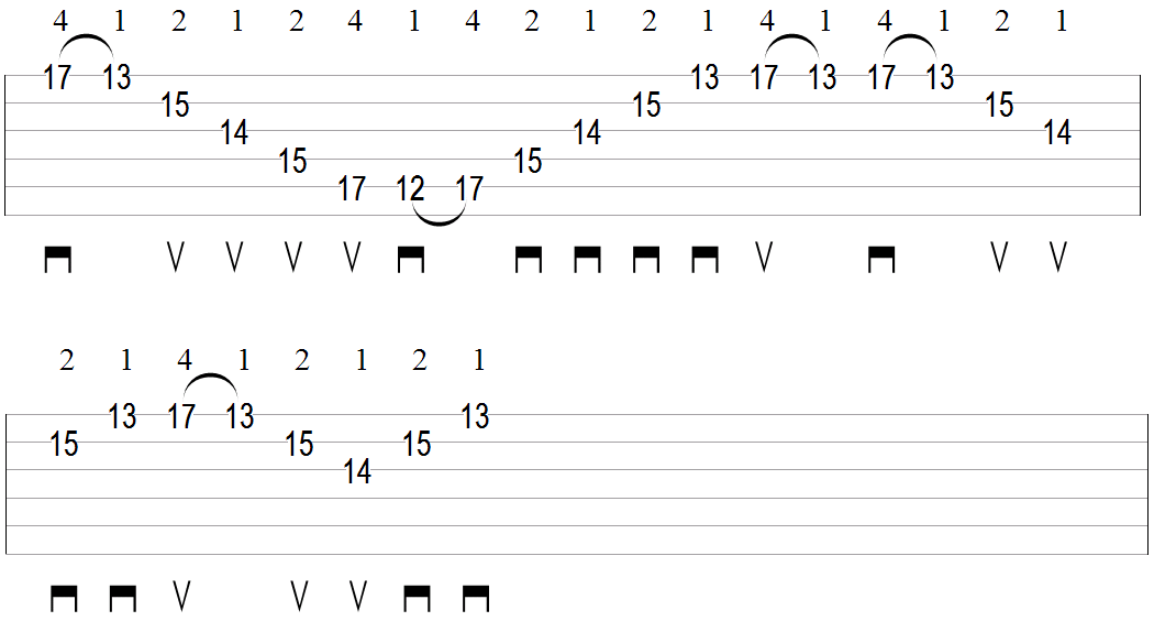
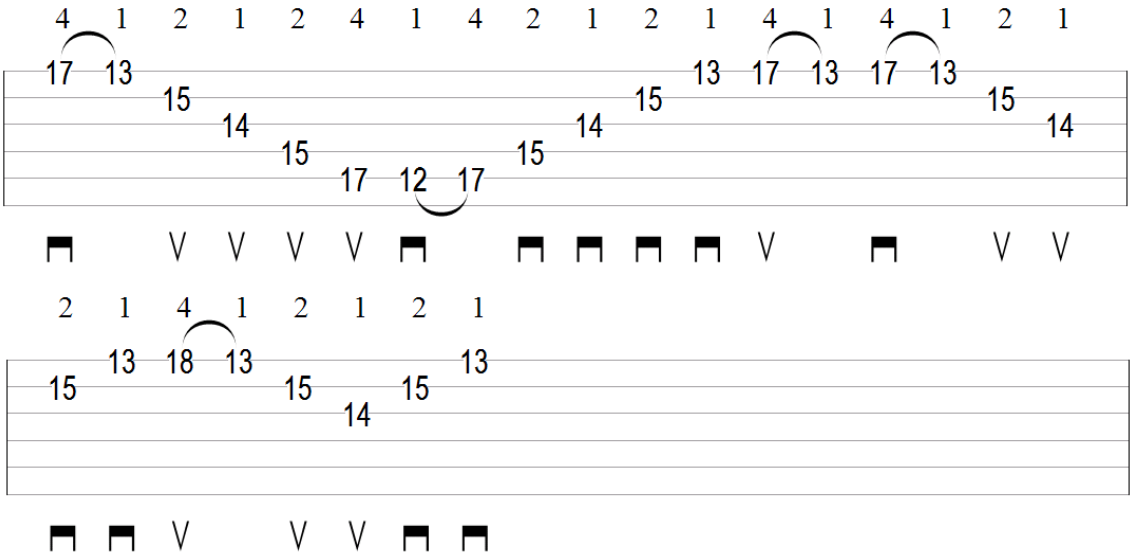


Hear It

Example 19: This variation expands upon the previous idea even more and combines the 5-string arpeggio with its 3-string version, repeating the 2 highest notes on the high E string and adding another note from the scale to the basic arpeggio:



Hear it

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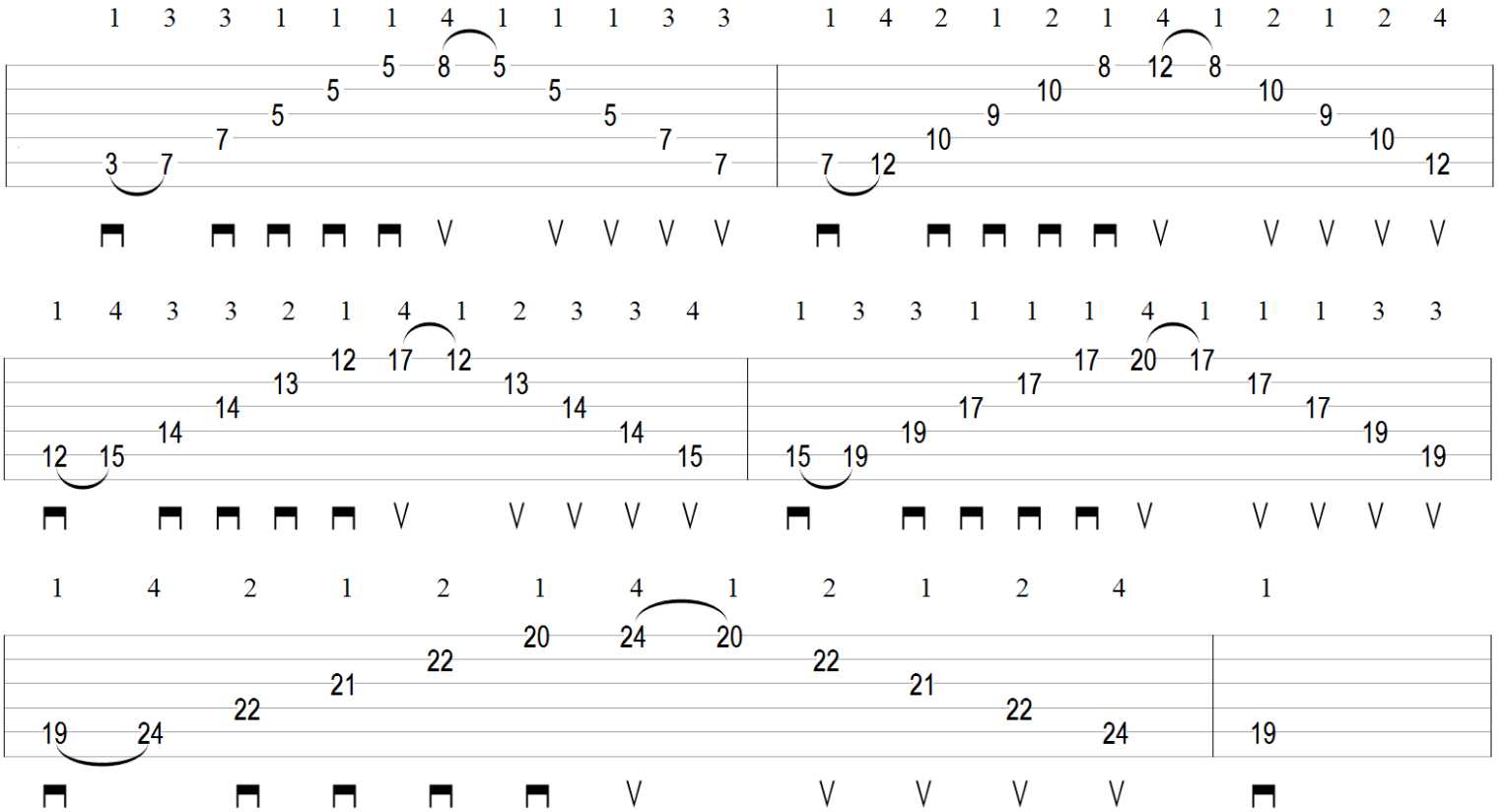
<u>Example 20:</u> This variation connects 5-string minor arpeggio shapes all over the neck of the guitar. This example is related to Example 11 shown earlier, only here 5-string arpeggios are used. Note: the chord/arpeggio here is A minor (not D minor) to illustrate that the general concepts apply the same way to any arpeggio, in any key.



Hear It

This is the A minor 2nd inversion arpeggio that the above variation is based on. The notes of the A minor arpeggio are A C E (with E being the lowest sounding note in this arpeggio shape):

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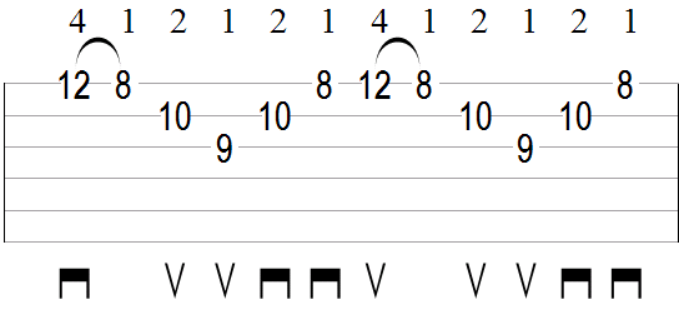
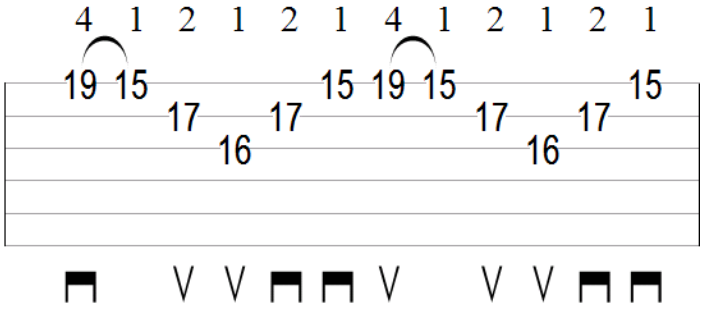


Hear It

The next 5 examples are based on the E minor arpeggio. The notes in the E minor arpeggio are: E G B. These 5 examples all use the same general concept: they add 2 other notes of the scale to the basic arpeggio. The 2 notes being added are: C (b6) and F# (2).

Here is the standard E minor 3 string shape (also shown here in 2nd inversion)



Hear It

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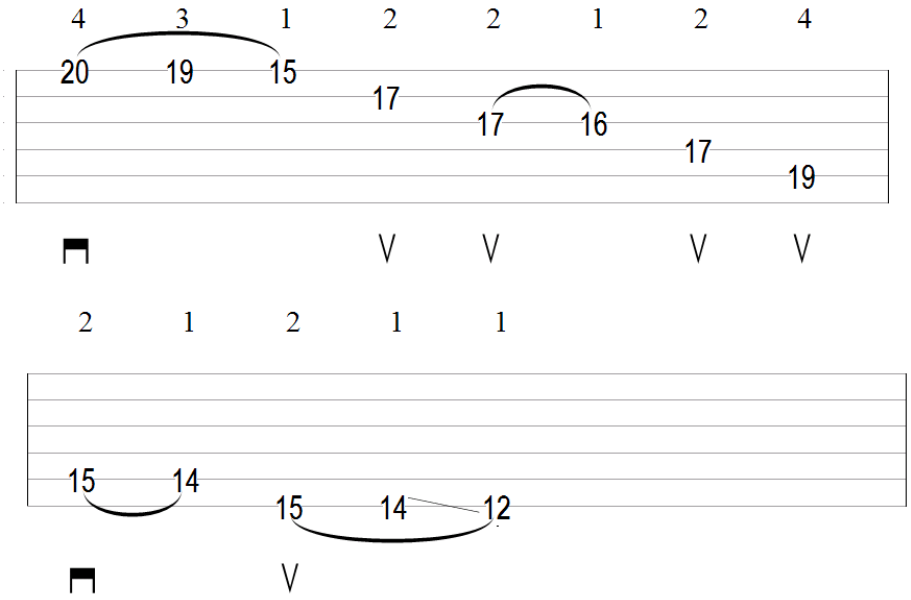
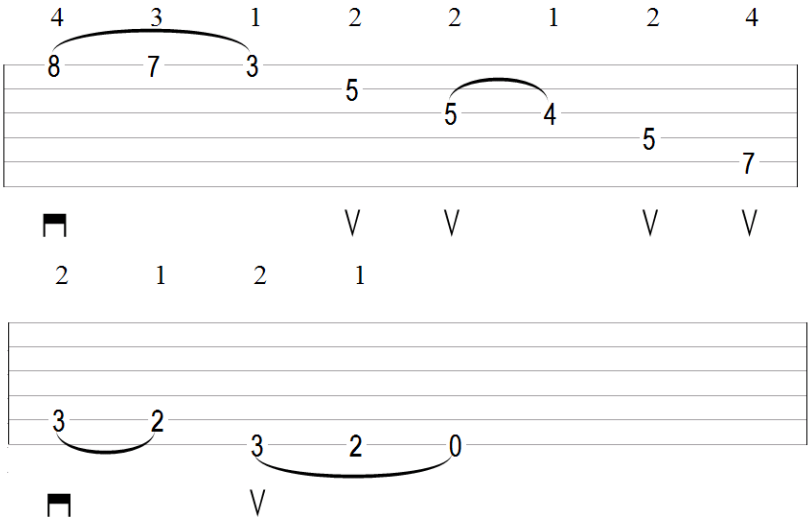
Example 21: This variation simply adds 2 notes from the E minor scale to the basic arpeggio.



Hear It

Example 22: This variation is exactly the same as the previous example, only played an octave lower.



Hear It

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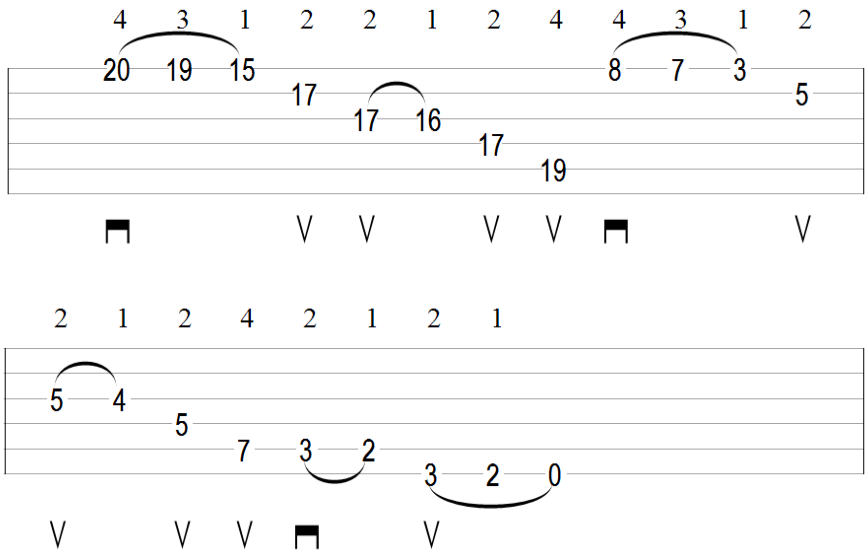
Example 23: This variation combines examples 21 and 22 into one longer lick.



Hear It

Example 24: This arpeggio lick is the same as the previous one, only we break up the sequence into 3 fragments instead of 2, adding an additional beat to the pattern. It now looks like this:

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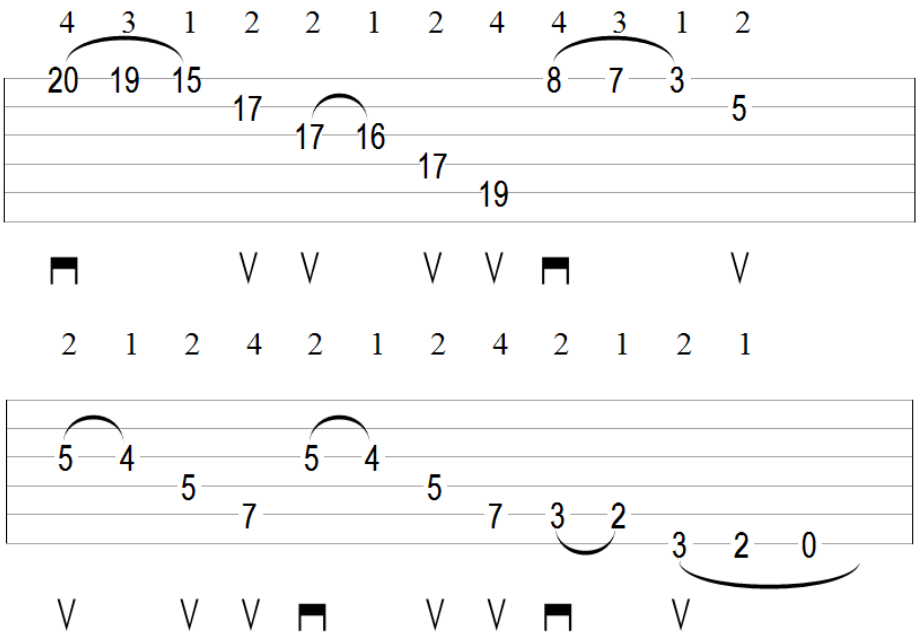
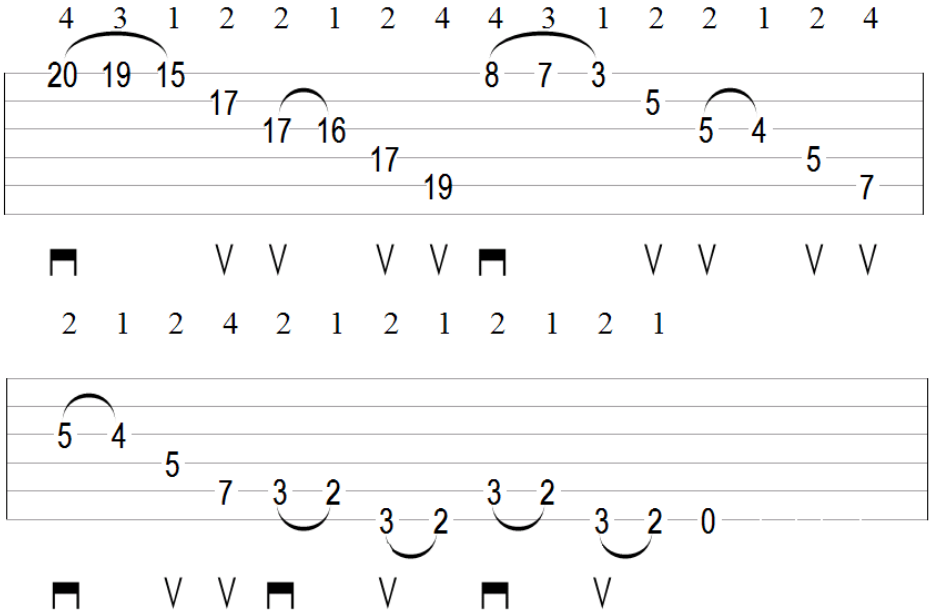


Hear It

<u>Example 25:</u> Here we will add another beat to the sequence above to extend the arpeggio even further.



Hear It

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What You Should Do Right now:

You've now seen many examples of how to create awesome guitar licks from simple arpeggios. Here is what you should do next to fully master this skill in *your* guitar playing:

1. Realize that creativity with arpeggios (and musical creativity in general) is achievable by anyone, including you. All that is required is learning to integrate general musical skills with your arpeggio playing to create killer licks and phrases.

2. Work on mastering sweep picking on a physical level, so you have a much easier time playing these (and any other) arpeggios, cleanly, expressively and fast.

Many people struggle to sweep pick fast and clean and assume that this technique is very difficult to do well. This assumption is wrong. Fact is, sweep picking (when practiced correctly) is one of the *easiest* techniques to learn and master.

Give me 5 minutes and I'll prove it to you (and help YOU to become a sweep picking master):
http://tomhess.net/LearnToSweepPickFastAndClean

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